

December 28, 1959

Dr. Frank Fenner
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Dear Frank:

To your note of the 22nd.

I am glad to hear that you are coming along now with your plan for the development of genetics at the John Curtin School of Medical Research. I'm afraid that I'm not acquainted with Walsh, but his line of work is somewhat out of my own field. If you want a good outside opinion I suggest you consult the Races in London.

I do have two suggestions, however. 1) It certainly does seem a good idea to put some stress on human genetics in a graduate medical department. However, I think you would eventually regret building an implied restriction into the name of the department and I would specifically urge that you call such a department, Genetics rather than Human Genetics. This should certainly make no difference to the kind of man that you install and it may make it a little easier later on to broaden the scope of such a department. I certainly do think that a fully developed department should not be confined to human genetics. The best precedent I could find for such a situation is Jim Neel's department at the University of Michigan and you might wish to consult him about just this point. I have the definite impression, however, that he himself would also favor the more general title.

Although I certainly think that other things being equal, or nearly so, you ought definitely to favor local talent in filling Australian chairs, I do have one alternative suggestion to make to you as a candidate. He is Harry Harris, M.D., who now holds a position in Penrose's department at the Galton Laboratory, University College, London. Harris has done some very respectable work indeed in both the genetic and physiological analysis of human biochemical anomalies and I think he certainly should be ripe for just such a chair as you have in mind. Whether he would be concretely interested I have no way of knowing but I would not have suggested his name without some suspicion of it. You might find a good, though now no longer up-to-date, account of the work he is interested in in his "Introduction to Human Biochemical Genetics" which appeared as a memoir, number 37, of the Eugenics Laboratory which is the Galton Laboratory. This was published in 1955 by Cambridge University Press. I ran into him again earlier this year at the CIBA Foundation Symposium on Human Biochemical Genetics and he again gave very good account of himself. I hope a suggestion like this does not muddy the water for you more than it helps but I believe it might well be of some interest to you.

My experience here, and expectation elsewhere, is that there should be no conflict at all between having a department which is particularly concerned with genetics and the further treatment of special aspects of the subject in other departments. The same holds, of course, for biochemistry where such a situation has a longer history.

I understand your colleague, Professor Macfarlane, is also interested in genetics at least to the extent of helping to organize a panel on this subject for the Pacific Science Congress in 1961.

With best regards,

As ever,

Joshua Lederberg

Dictated but not read
JL:bb